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SUBJECT: WEEKLY MEDIA WRAP-UP: LEBANON DONORS' CONFERENCE, STATE
OF THE UNION ADDRESS. JANUARY 26, 2007.

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Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) The Lebanon Donors' Conference, held in Paris in the presence of Secretary Rice and Lebanese PM Siniora, received a fair amount of coverage and gave President Chirac personally a publicity boost in France, while the rioting prior to Siniora's departure from Beirut elicited commentary on Lebanon's prevailing instability and the prospects for economic reform. Commentary on President Bush's State of the Union address focused on his Iraq strategy and his alleged "inability" to convince Congress -- reaction to his position on global warming and the environment was widespread and positive. End Summary.

LEBANON DONORS' CONFERENCE

¶2. (SBU) Right-of-center Le Figaro reported on its front page that the "Lebanese opposition was in a tug of war [with the government]" and noted that "the crisis, triggered by Hezbollah, was taking place two days prior to the Lebanese Donors' Conference." The report further stated that "the conference was not just aiming to salvage Lebanon but also to play a preemptive role in the region." Right-of-center Le Figaro argued that "Washington and Paris do not wish for Siniora to be placed in a difficult economic situation." At the close of the conference, right-of-center Le Figaro noted that Chirac's conference had been a huge success (highlighting the generosity of the U.S. and Saudi Arabia), but lamented that "at the very moment of the conference" bloody battles were taking place in the Lebanese capital.

¶3. (SBU) Catholic La Croix affirmed that "the conference was off to a bad start." Dominique Quinio held that "Tuesday's strikes and demonstrations are setting the tone for the conference." Quinio argued that "while the international community was rushing to the bedside of an exhausted Lebanon, it will be taking the temperature of the entire region." Quinio concluded that "once again Lebanon is being used by others for interests that did not necessarily concern Lebanon, with France wanting to preserve its old influence and the U.S. to see Lebanon as a place where it can confront Syria indirectly." Jean Levallois in regional La Presse de La Manche agreed: "Between those who see the future of Lebanon through Syrian eyes and those who are considering giving part of Lebanon to the Palestinians in a bartering exercise, there lie many contradictory

interests."

¶4. (SBU) Gerard Dupuy concluded in left-wing Liberation that "the war with Israel antagonized the various Lebanese factions." Dupuy argued that "unless the Lebanese people find a modus vivendi favorable to a climate of trust, all the aid in the world pledged in Paris will be for naught."

STATE OF THE UNION

¶5. (SBU) Right-of-center Le Figaro welcomed President Bush's speech taking "note of global warming." Washington correspondent Philippe Gelie trumpeted that "although George W. Bush has not turned into a crusader against climate change, he was running the risk of becoming bogged down at home if he didn't make a gesture on the environment."

Left-of-center Le Monde argued in its editorial that the President had "devoted most of his speech to domestic issues" and that after years of a "rigid stance" on the environment, President Bush had "finally accepted the idea of quotas for gas emissions." In right-of-center Le Figaro, Philippe Gelie argued that "the President's proposals in matters of energy were not enough to divert America from its main concern, Iraq." But in right-of-center La Tribune Pascal Aubert wrote that "although we do not necessarily have to believe that President Bush has suddenly dressed in the green uniform of crusaders fighting against global warming, he has for the first time taken the problem seriously."

¶6. (SBU) A majority of reports focused on the President's plan for Iraq. For Catholic La Croix, "The State of the Union Address did not Convince Congress on Iraq." For right-of-center Le Figaro "George Bush Failed to Convince Congress on Iraq." Left-of-center Le Monde argued that President Bush's request that his new plan for Iraq "be given a chance" received a "lukewarm" reception and Philippe Grangereau in left-wing Liberation concluded that "the final chapter of George Bush's presidency was written in this annual State of the Union Address, a chapter that promises to be somber."

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Grangereau closed with the comment that, "in his crusade, George Bush is increasingly alone." Philippe Gelie, in right-of-center Le Figaro, shared the same view when he commented: "On all other issues President Bush is already a lame duck; on Iraq, he is being attacked from all sides and his prerogatives as Commander in Chief are being assailed by Congress."
STAPLETON